

Fashion Outlook

Children's clothes stand on their own

FASHION



MARY MARTIN NIEPOLD

The magic that children possess can be seen instantly in the way that they always choose the brightest, prettiest colors. Notice a little girl in a flower garden. Standing in front of a toy counter. Or pulling down her favorite dress.

Shiny, bright colors are as natural to a child as wanting a third scoop of ice cream. Fortunately, more and more children's designers are tapping into the magic of a child's imagination and creating concoctions of clothes spilling with color, happy patterns and sing-song versions of adult styles.

"Watch for color with color, color with white and color with black," says Mary Carter, spokesperson for Osh-Kosh B'Gosh. "A wide spectrum of color and design are found throughout both the girls' and the boys' collections from sizes newborn through 14 for girls and up to size 20 for boys."

Patterns to match these happy, sunny colors for the wee set point to Caribbean florals, Aztec abstracts, African adventures and ecological warnings. Garden florals for girls and racing stripes for boys abound, as they always do — but this year they are likely to be zapped by a strong shot of neon green or burst of Big Bird yellow.

Gone are the days when colors and patterns were solid, simple and, quite frankly, boring. Today's baby-boomer parents, brimming with a sense of style in their own thirty-something mode of success, want the same for their children.

According to cultural anthropologist Steve Barnett in a recent article in The New York Times, "As the baby-boom generation gets older, it falls back on cultural patterns it knows. More value is placed on the children. ... It's the children who can fulfill all the parents' hopes and dreams."

Which is a notion not unknown to parents of any generation, last century or this. What's different are the cultural antecedents to which parents refer for reflection in their children. These baby-boom parents remember the '60s vividly. Voila. Jeans, peace symbols, tie-dye fabrics, swirly florals, message clothing, love beads, psychedelic colors, vests and granny glasses are just a few of the major Woodstock retreads now appearing on children.

Other unavoidable influences on children's clothing are music videos and shows like "Sesame Street." Splashy colors and sophisticated versions of "big people" styles are inevitable for children with a "me-too" mentality.

Another noticeable difference from

the brown or red corduroys of yesterday — when a sister could easily wear a brother's tops or bottoms — is the fact that 1990 has ushered in clothing that looks very me-girl, you-boy.

Now, just like the old days, girls' dresses are unmistakably ruffled, bowed, beaded, flowered or flounced. Boys' clothes, conversely, look very much like the smaller version of their dad's seersucker suits, denim jackets or khaki wide-legged trousers and shorts.

For designer Joan Calabrese, the move to girls looking like girls is old hat. She has been designing upscale "couture" versions of dresses for young girls for 15 years. Her "sport-



OSHKOSH B'GOSH paints a playful spring picture with pastel gingham checks and stripes.

ed silks, taffetas, laces and velvets have been featured in the pages of Town and Country, and at an average cost of \$350 dollars per dress, these are not, unfortunately, a reality for most young girls. What is true with Calabrese's designs is the fact that the mass market has now caught up with her notion that girls should be feminine.

"I have no interest whatsoever in

the '60s nostalgia," she says. "There's a big, big movement to reproduce the '60s, you know, sort of funky styles, some muted colors, some designs from the leftover hippie era. But it's very unfeminine, as far as I'm concerned. I like feminine, but I don't like feminine that is representative of Victoriana. What we do today should never make an attempt to recapture the past, but always move forward."

For Calabrese, that means creating ingenue looks that don't look like mini versions of their mothers' party dresses. Most moderate price designers and manufacturers today are tapping into the young-but-sophisticated mode of styling. From Adrienne Vittadini to Esprit — big girl styling merges with little girl charm.

Vittadini creates floral and polka dot sundresses whose sophisticated lines in scoop necks and flared skirts recall the adult, while delicate patterns evoke young-at-heart feelings. Esprit merges both worlds, as well, when they dress a 4-year old in a white denim jacket, just like Mom's, except that the daughter's version plays peek-a-boo with purple polka dot cuffs and matching pants.

While the mood in this spring's children's fashions may come close to matching the more sophisticated styles found in adult styles, there's one noticeable difference. "There's more life, more fun, more freedom in today's styles," says Calabrese. And if we're lucky, it's the kids who will someday bring it back to their parents.

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By Glenda Hughes, Sales Rep.

Because this column is so important in today's market, I'm printing it again!

How does one really know what their home is worth? It's a question that is asked of us on a very regular basis, obviously. It is also the most misunderstood answer that we have to deal with. When we have a phone call to come over to a client's home to evaluate their house, in many cases the client is asking more than one agent (usually three) to give them a price. Several things happen when this is done, and I think you should be very aware of it. As listings are nice to have you can be assured that out of the three agents you call in, at least one of them is going to overprice your home because they know that most people will take the agent that gives them the best price. This, my readers, is probably one of the biggest, most frustrating mistakes that you can make. When your home is overpriced, you fall into the category of "spin off". This means, that the showings you get will not result in a sale, but will result in attracting clients in that price range who know that your property is overpriced, and then want to see what is really available in that price range and hence we get a "spin off" client from an overpriced home. Not great for you - but not bad for the sales rep!

You can prevent this from happening if you have your wits about you and know what to look for when you have agents give you a price. Prices are set on homes by PAST sales of similar homes in similar areas. We adjust for the current market, how your home shows (this could be either up or down) and what is currently being sold on the market! We do understand that everyone has an emotional tie to their home - and it is very hard to be honest and accurate with people, when their hearts are involved - but we must do that if we are doing our job right!

Your agent of choice can help you come to a marketable price by doing a market evaluation. Now, I don't mean just having someone walk through your home and smile at you and say your home is worth this many \$\$\$\$. Ask him or her to show you figures to back up the figure that is quoted. Ask lots of questions about the homes that have sold - particularly the condition of the home, the extras and the location. A home that looks just like yours does not necessarily mean that yours will sell for the same price. Your rep should know - and if he or she does not, ask for them to find out more information and get back to you before you make a commitment on the price of your home. If you do indeed have more than one rep price your home and one price comes in much higher than the others - your antennas should be up, quickly. Ask why and how that price was reached, and they better have some pretty good answers to substantiate that price. Remember, above all, put your emotions in the closet for now and remain sane.

When you finally have a good figure to work with, then you can choose your rep based on previous columns I have written and will continue to write about in the future.

Keep your wits about you - it is worth it in the end "frustration factor!"

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